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Farming in Partnership with Local Governments

GROWING together

BRITISH COLUMBIA

CONSUMERS are recognizing the importance of maintaining a secure local food supply. Locally produced food is fresher and more nutritious. It also represents a huge reduction in energy use and pollution and an increase in dollars circulating through the local economy.

We've made it easier for farmers to access farmland within their communities by making changes to the Land Title Act. The amendments to the Act permit farmers to enter into long-term leases without going through subdivision requirements.

Municipal governments provided valuable input for our upcoming provincial Agriculture Plan. We all agree that a thriving local agriculture community is necessary for the health of the province and its citizens. I am confident the new Plan will position the agriculture industry towards a bright and prosperous future.

PAT BELL
Minister of Agriculture and Lands

RDCO hires Agriculture Support Officer

THE Regional District of Central Okanagan (RDCO) hired an Agricultural Support Officer to implement its agricultural area plan.

In its 2003 agricultural area plan, RDCO identified a number of issues and farmers identified several gaps, mainly concerning regional and municipal planning, business management, education and information sharing, says Keith Dalhaime, acting manager hired in mid-2006. During RDCO's two-year pilot program, Dalhaime will be bridging these gaps.

With farmers increasingly concerned about urban encroachment, Dalhaime is helping farmers plan the transition from tree fruit to grape and cherry production.

Not only are farmers benefiting, RDCO is too.

Having someone to bounce idea and demands both agriculture and the planners perspective benefits local government," said Terie Watson, RDCO senior planner.

Keith understands and links farmers from the community and local governments. He's helping to build solutions, long-term solutions," said Glen Lucas, general manager of the Okanagan Farmers Association.

Local residents live on the land. Ensuring farmers minimize noise, odour and dust and that residents understand normal farming practices reduces the number of urban/rural conflicts RDCO must resolve.

Dalhaime is planning a "farm fresh guide" with maps showing Okanagan residents and visitors where they can buy fruit, vegetables and other products.

With seniors and wealthy investors driving Okanagan land prices up to $100,000 an acre, preserving farmland and farming is a challenge, says Dalhaime.

RDCO's decision to hire an Agricultural Support Officer is an innovative example of how local governments can balance community interests.

Local Planning for Specified Risk Material Disposal

MUNICIPAL AND REGIONAL governments wanting to ensure their agri-food sector handles abattoir wastes wisely now have access to federal/provincial funding assistance.

The $12.5 million Canada-British Columbia Specified Risk Material Management Program, announced in April, helps industry and communities comply with new Canadian Food Inspection Agency regulations which came into effect in July.

The program is for communities and eligible businesses wanting to manage specified risk materials (SRM), or certain parts that could be infected with bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE, or mad cow disease).

The federal government's $7.5 million contribution is part of an $80 million nationwide SRM management and risk mitigation effort aimed at making Canada BSE-free. The provincial government is contributing $5 million through the complementary Livestock Waste Treat Initiative (LWTI).

Funding is available for SRM separation, storage, destruction and conveyance to on-site and/or daughter plants. Money is available to municipal and regional governments and community groups wanting to undertake SRM destruction or conveyance projects involving incinerators, rendering, landfilling, composting, or other innovative technologies.

Safe handling and disposal of SRM wastes will improve Canada's food safety, ensure its cattle industry prospers, and enable Canadian food producers and processors to meet international food safety standards.

Abbotsford Agritourism bylaw

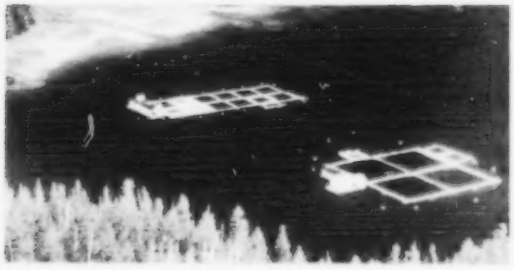
THE CITY OF ABBOTSFORD amended its zoning bylaw to make it easier for farmers to operate agritourism and direct farm marketing enterprises.

The new bylaw is designed to align with Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR) regulations which consider these activities to be part of farming. Farmers must now go through a lengthy application and approval process. They can now construct on-farm retail and agritourism businesses a maximum of 300 square metres.

In such a move, the number of agritourism and direct farm market enterprises in the Fraser Valley has increased. The amendment strengthens the farm sector and enhances its ability to contribute to the local economy. Harmonizing Abbotsford's bylaws with the Agricultural Land Commission's rules encourages producers to expand their businesses.

Other communities wanting to encourage agritourism can draw from Abbotsford's example.

B.C.'s first Aquaculture Advisory Committee created



THE REGIONAL DISTRICT of Mount Waddington (RDMW) inaugurated B.C.'s first Aquaculture Advisory Committee (AAC) this spring.

"Our AAC promotes dialogue," said RDMW chair Brenda Sweanor.

The nine-member committee includes representatives from provincial government, environmental groups, the salmon farming industry, shellfish sector, regional district and local First Nations communities.

"Salmon farming is a controversial issue and we may have diverse opinions, but as long as we're all at the table talking, we have a chance of agreeing on what we want at the local level," said Sweanor.

"Aquaculture is complex", said coastal land use specialist Clint Cullon. "Working together lets AAC members share information and pool their expertise."

RDMW's AAC is modelled after Advisory Committees in agriculture which other communities are now using to foster common vision, understanding, and community-based decision making.

"AACs enable local governments to influence the future of their communities," said Cullon.

For more information, contact Clint Cullon, (250) 974-3261, clint@cullon.ca

Agriculture Advisory Committee Workshop

WELL OVER 100 delegates attended the third biennial province-wide Agricultural Advisory Committee (AAC) workshop held in Langley on February 2007.

Issues covered included agricultural area planning and rezoning for seasonal farm workers housing. The Town of Agassiz Committee explained how delegates can touch with chefs to showcase local fare to residents. Small group sessions focused on subdivision criteria, water management, and ways to limit the amount of farmland taken out of production by country estates. In their own special session, local government staff discussed ideas, information and tips on working with AACs.

"The workshop gives people involved with AAC's a chance to learn more about forging good working relations between local government representatives, farmers and residents," said Ken Nickel, Director of Resource Management for the B.C. Ministry of Agriculture and Lands, which organized the event.

For more information, contact Jim Gilliland, 604 556-3006, jim.gilliland@gov.bc.ca

Delta Zoning Bylaw amendments support agriculture

THANKS to dialogue and persistence, the Corporation of Delta has added new agriculture-related provisions to its zoning bylaw. The Minister of Agriculture and Lands approved and Council adopted the bylaw in June 2007.

Using the Ministry's Guide for Bylaw Development in Farming Areas, the bylaw defines farming and specifies building setbacks and site coverage maximums. It also updates criteria for farm retail sales.

To minimize future infrastructure costs, the bylaw calls for modified farm uses within 150 metres of the Agricultural Land Reserve / urban edge. The Ministry and Delta are committed to future "edge planning" that will add measures for urban side uses to increase compatibility with farming.

For more information, contact Kathleen Zimmerman, 604 946-3220, Kathleen.Zimmerman@gov.bc.ca

Emergency carcass disposal planning funding available through UBCM

EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT is one of today's fastest growing areas of concern. While local governments may be well prepared to manage floods and fires and care for citizens, managing livestock disease outbreaks remains a challenge for many communities.

When disasters strike, the volume and infectious nature of carcass disposal can pose huge challenges.

Being prepared is the best strategy.

Under the Livestock Waste Emergency Initiative (LWEI), $705,000 will be made available this fall to the Union of British Columbia Municipalities (UBCM) to help local governments develop emergency response plans to deal with large-scale livestock mortalities. The funding is part of the federal and provincial $12.5 million Specified Risk Material program designed to help B.C.'s beef processors and communities dispose of waste in a safe, efficient, cost-effective manner. Funding for emergency carcass disposal plans is being administered by the Investment Agriculture Foundation of British Columbia.

Few communities can reasonably be expected to develop such plans alone. The UBCM and the provincial government conducted pilot projects to develop two templates for managing mass animal mortalities. One is for a community with intensive farming, the other is for communities with extensive farming.

"The amendment of existing emergency plans to address livestock emergencies will benefit the economic, health, and environmental well-being of local communities," said UBCM President Brenda Bonnie.

For more information, contact Ken Nickel, 604 556-3104, Ken.Nickel@gov.bc.ca

Islands Agri-Food Initiative

FUNDING from the $5.7 million Islands Agri-Food Initiative (IAFI) is being used to develop viable, sustainable agri-food enterprises on Vancouver Island and the Gulf Islands by attracting new agri-food business investment, scaling up commercial production and developing food security plans.

The Cowichan Valley Economic Development Society (CVEDS) is working expansion of the area's agri-food industry its top priority, said CVEDS economic development officer John Warnett. The Agriculture Area Plan and economic development strategy show the Valley has great potential. CVEDS' multi-level "Canning Beyond the Orchard" campaign includes a Farmers Guide and maps showing consumers and visitors where they can purchase farm fresh produce. Efforts touting the garlic and lavender of buying locally produced food and workshops designed to enhance local producers' production and marketing skills.

To increase the sale of local products, the Cowichan Green Community is cultivating closer links between Cowichan Valley farmers, consumers and grocery chains, institutions and restaurants. It is also developing a community food action plan.

Salt Spring Island farmers are investigating how they can increase their efficiency and yields. With IAFI funding, they're organizing commercial production workshops and on-site demos.

Funding for IAFI projects comes from the Agri-Food Futures Fund, a joint federal-provincial program held in trust with the Investment Agriculture Foundation of BC.

For more information, contact Jim Gilliland, 604 556-3006, jim.gilliland@gov.bc.ca

Spallumcheen's Agricultural Plan and Goals

THE TOWNSHIP OF SPALLUMCHEEN completed an Agricultural Area Plan in 2006. The North Okanagan township's nine-point plan focuses squarely on "the promotion of sustainable agriculture." Key goals are to:

1. *Support and strengthen local agricultural enterprise*
2. *Avoid extra costs of doing business and regulation*
3. *Work with the farm sector to make operations more productive and efficient*
4. *Protect the resource base (land and water) for working agriculture*
5. *Promote agricultural best management practices*
6. *Minimize the impact of agriculture on the environment*
7. *Protect the township's rural character*
8. *Encourage "good neighbour" relations*
9. *Initiate public education about farming*

To achieve these goals, Spallumcheen's Agricultural Advisory Committee will continue to advise Council on agricultural issues. Outreach and communication efforts will include farmers and non-farmers. The township plans to partner with local producers, community groups, and provincial agencies to achieve its goals.

For more information, contact Alan Harrison, (250) 546-3013, Alan.Harrison@gov.bc.ca

Population – production overlaps

TWO TRIANGLES showing where British Columbia's agri-food producers and consumers congregate illustrate how important it is for farmers and urbanites to live cooperatively.

According to 2006 census data, 80 per cent of British Columbians live in two small triangles accounting for 2.7 per cent of B.C.'s land base. The first extends southeast from Hope through the Fraser Valley to Qualicum Beach in Victoria and Sooke. The second triangle encompasses the Okanagan from Scantons to Kamloops to Osoyoos.

B.C.'s two most densely populated regions also house the province's best farm land and growing conditions. They generate much of the province's food. In fact, these two tiny triangles generate 80 per cent of the province's annual farm receipts.

The 2006 census reveals that urbanization and agri-food production are intertwining to unique in the southwestern corner of the province. Between 2001 and 2006, 90.5 per cent of B.C.'s population increase occurred in that region, as did 67 per cent of the total increase in provincial farm receipts.

Matching food production to increases in population creates challenges. But close proximity to food sources can benefit consumers and producers if local governments create conditions that encourage people living on each side of the fence to be good neighbours.

Financial Contribution of Agriculture to Local Governments

A NEW PROVINCIAL STUDY reveals that farming can be a net contributor to municipal tax bases.

Using Abbotsford and Pitt Meadows as test cases, the Ministry of Agriculture and Lands (BCMAL) analyzed the financial contributions and costs of all major categories of land use.

The study found that farming farm enterprises in these two communities and the countryside they contribute more in local taxes than they cost.

Local governments wishing to evaluate the economic contribution of farm land can use BCMAL's report as a guide. Copies are available by contacting the Ministry.

School Fruit and Vegetable Snack Program

Healthy snacks for students

THIS FALL, B.C.'s School Fruit and Vegetable Snack Program (SFVSP) was expanded to include over 100 schools. Under the SFVSP, fresh, nutritious B.C. fruits and vegetables are provided to participating elementary, middle and secondary schools for 10 weeks.

The program boosts healthy eating practices today and for the long-term. Equally important, the program teaches students about food security and the benefits of eating locally produced agri-food products.

Launched in 2005, the program is one of many ActNow BC initiatives aimed at making B.C. the healthiest region ever to host an Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games.

The goal for the program is to offer every public school in B.C. the opportunity to participate in the program by 2010.

North Saanich Agricultural Advisory Commission

IN MAY 2007, the District of North Saanich established an Agricultural Advisory Commission (AAC).

The North Saanich Council created an Agricultural Task Force in 2005. In its 2007 final report, the Task Force recommended Council create a permanent AAC and undertake an Agricultural Area Plan.

The District will begin work on an Agricultural Area Plan in 2008. This process will create opportunities for Council and staff to work with a diverse group of North Saanich's agri-food producers.

North Saanich Council is keen to work with the new AAC, which will offer advice on food and farm policies, regulations and other related matters.

Having a formal forum in which to discuss agricultural issues will help local officials and producers address and meet the challenges and opportunities arising from development pressures in North Saanich.

Kootenay Boundary Agriculture Initiative completed

AN AGRICULTURE DEVELOPMENT STUDY commissioned by the Regional District of Kootenay Boundary (RDKB) makes several recommendations aimed at developing viable, sustainable agriculture opportunities in the Boundary region.

High on the list are recommendations that RDKB undertake an Agriculture Area Plan, create an Agriculture Advisory Committee and hire industry development trainee for agriculture development.

The study, funded by the Investment Agriculture Foundation of BC, recognizes ranching is the region's core agricultural enterprise. In addition to promoting agriculture and supporting ranchers, the study suggests that RDKB encourage agroforestry, farmers' markets and organic production, and consider expanding local meat processing capabilities. Turkey, game and cheese, grapes and wine, and Christmas trees were also cited as opportunities for diversification.

The study recommends that RDKB act as a catalyst to assist with producers, agricultural organizations and local agencies like the Boundary Economic Development Commission to stimulate and sustain development of the West Kootenay agri-food industry.

ActNow BC

School fridges make milk cool

THE BC DAIRY FOUNDATION is well on its way to providing refrigerators to 700 schools throughout British Columbia, thanks to ActNow BC's Incentive Fund Program. The Foundation's Elementary School Milk Program (ESMP) encourages schools to serve milk to students at least three times a week and provides program support such as contests and prizes.

Free fridges are available to elementary schools which sign on to the milk program. Fridges ensure schools have a place to store milk, which makes it easier for students to make healthy nutritious food choices.

During the first year of the free fridge program, the number of schools participating in the ESMP rose from 40 per cent to 51 per cent.

The fridges also support other in-school Healthy Eating Programs such as the B.C. School Fruit and Vegetable Snack Program.

Easy, healthy food

A NEW AGRI-FOOD industry alliance, Agri-Food Partners in Healthy Eating, is striving to make "the healthy choice the easy choice." The alliance includes all members of the food chain, from field to fork — producers, processors, distributors, retailers and food service businesses.

Together, members plan to develop and promote fun, nutritious food alternatives. For example, they want to replace junk food sold in vending machines with apple slices, carrot sticks and low sugar granola bars.

Busy families want convenience, quickness, and high quality food. By pooling their efforts and ideas, alliance members will promote the development and distribution of tasty, healthy home-grown alternatives at upcoming events throughout B.C.

First Nations Community Food

AS FIRST NATIONS PEOPLE drift away from their traditional diets, they often experience significantly higher rates of obesity, diabetes and other health problems. In response, ActNow BC and the B.C. Ministry of Agriculture and Lands are supporting the development of First Nations community food systems.

Such systems consist of a community garden, community kitchen, and food processing and food storage facilities, too.

The success of a Bella Coola community garden inspired 26 other First Nations groups to plan similar projects.

Community food systems can help First Nations communities improve their health through increased production and consumption of fruits and vegetables. Through the program, members of the community get more involved, connect with the land, work together to build capacity and become more self-sufficient.

Abbotsford-Sumas Aquifer Conference

[illegible] AGRICAN, and American scientists and government representatives met in Abbotsford on April 2007 to share ideas on protecting the Abbotsford-Sumas Aquifer.

The 200-square kilometre aquifer is a key drinking water supply for Abbotsford area residents, local agricultural businesses and communities across the Canada-U.S. border.

Agencies on both sides of the border have been trying to boost water conservation for 20 years, but have been unable to achieve significant improvements. The surrounding soils demand levels of water pumping, despite intensive management and household users. Aquifer contamination remains a big challenge.

The conference was scheduled by the City of Abbotsford – Aquifer Science Committee gave delegates an opportunity to hear what the Lower Basin soils, aquifers, and ground water contaminants.

Through further research, extension and government efforts, it's hoped to develop policies that will lower nitrate contamination levels and protect drinking water quality on both sides of the border.

[illegible]

Slow Food Bike Tour

[illegible] BC ACCDAC ambassadors and locavores – people who eat foods grown and produced as close to home as possible – participating in Agassiz "Slow Food Cycle Tour" (SFCT) cobbled on artisan cheese, enriched on heritage apples, sampled honey and herbs and savoured the farm-style flavour of Fraser Valley fruits and vegetables. Along the 40 kilometre route, they visited a B.C. heritage farm, 100-year-old general store, commercial dairy and an array of local farms. Participants also enjoyed fresh air, exercise, and spectacular scenery.

Inspired by Piedmont's Slow Food Cycle Sunday, which attracted 1,000 participants last year, and Fraser Valley self-guided Circle Farm Tours, the SFCT gave consumers an opportunity to meet local farmers and learn more about where their food comes from and how it is produced.

Combined with [illegible] tastings, and conversations, get local governments and businesses an opportunity to show consumers the connection between the quality of food they eat, the landscape they see, their ecological and food footprints, and the province's food self-sufficiency.

[illegible]

Food Self-Reliance Study

[illegible]

B.C. Agricultural (and Aquaculture) Advisory Committees now total 32

[illegible] 32

Lower Mainland (12 AACs)

- [illegible] NEW
- [illegible] NEW

Vancouver Island/Gulf Islands (10 AACs)

- [illegible] NEW
- [illegible] NEW
- [illegible] NEW

Interior / North (10 AACs)

- [illegible]

Local Agricultural Initiatives across British Columbia

LOCAL GOVERNMENTS across B.C., in partnership with the B.C. Ministry of Agriculture and Lands (B.MAL), are taking steps to support agriculture. Several agricultural land use inventories (LUI) have been finished this past year or are under way. They provide a background profile of agriculture in various places, such as Official Community Plans (OCP), Agricultural Area Plans (Ag Plans) or water use strategies. In a few cases, BCMAL initiates LUIs for its own research. Each LUI will have a report containing descriptive and maps showing the distribution of land uses.

	Local Government	Land Use Inventory	Ag Plan	Other Plans
1	Cariboo RD (Williams Lake and 150 Mile House fringe areas)	Data collected 2005; report in process		OCPs in process for each community
2	Cariboo RD (Quesnel fringe area)	Completion of data collection in 2007		OCP pending in 2007- 08
3	East Kootenay RD	General data collected in 2006	Background report being prepared	Two OCPs in process
4	Salt Spring Island (part of the Islands Trust)	Data collected in 2006; report in preparation	In process	OCP Review in process
5	Capital RD (Metchosin, Saanich, Central Saanich, North Saanich)	Data collected in 2005; reports in preparation		North Saanich OCP review completed in 2007
6	Fraser - Fort George RD	Completion of data collection in 2007		BCMAL initiative; major transportation project pending
7	Okanagan Basin Water Project (all areas of the basin)	Completion of data collection in 2007		Large study of future water needs
	- Rural Oliver		In process	
	- District of Lake Country		In process	
	- District of Coldstream		In process	
8	Thompson-Nicola RD (Noble Creek area)	Data collected in 2006		Water management study and model in process
9	Thompson-Nicola RD (Nicola River Basin)	Data collected in 2007		Water management study and model in process
10	Township of Langley	Data collected in 2007; report to be prepared		Water management study and model in process
11	Fraser Valley Regional District, electoral areas	Data collected in 2007; report to be prepared		BCMAL initiative for research
12	Central Coast Regional District (Bella Coola valley)	By contractor; data collected in 2007	Agri-food strategy in process	
13	Cranbrook	Data collected in 2006 by contractor and BCMAL		Municipal Growth Management Study completed in 2007

[illegible]